Faith & Inspiration

It Takes Time

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By Vincent V. Marshburn -

It should be clear from Scripture that God's plan of redemption has been a progressively unfolding and ongoing affair. The Bible would be quite short indeed if God had somehow simply "fixed" everything after Adam and Eve rebelled and rejected his benevolent will. In a real sense, the entire point of history is to provide the framework within which God carefully crafts the masterpiece of the gospel. It is the canvas upon which the boldness and subtlety, brilliance and nuance of his noble vision to redeem and reconcile all creation unveils and emerges from broad strokes to fine details.

Thus, we can begin to understand that the entire process of redemption does not occur with immediacy or in an instantaneous manner. Part of this restoration of harmony throughout Creation involves the reconciliation of humanity to God himself, as well as reconciliation among ourselves (Romans 5:10, Ephesians 2:16, Colossians 1:20).

What exactly is reconciliation? We may be accustomed to encountering the concept of forgiveness pertaining to the gospel, and we are regularly urged to exercise and practice it as a reflection of God's own forgiveness towards us (Matthew 6:12-15, Ephesians 4:31-32, Colossians 3:13). Forgiveness is the granting of a pardon or the cancellation of a liability. Technically, it requires only overture by the subject of offense or debt. Forgiveness can be offered, but there is no guarantee that it will be accepted.

Reconciliation is an aspect and product of forgiveness and is a matter of volition on the part of all involved. Efforts can be made towards reconciliation by one party but rejected or ignored by another. For reconciliation to be achieved, there must be mutual concession, compromise, and cooperation.

Scripture mentions that as believers we have been bestowed the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). Through our delivery of the gospel, we proclaim the truth of forgiveness by God and reconciliation with God. We also work to exhibit these manifestations of mercy and grace through efforts at building and mending relationships, expanding the notion of reconciliation to encompass both our divine dependence as well as our affiliation with fellow human beings. Ideally, if we are each individually reconciled to God, it should follow naturally that we should be able to be reconciled with one another. Of course, reality may be somewhat more complicated.

Typically, harmonization and stabilization of human relationships, especially among those at odds, between family members and strangers alike, can require varying amounts of time and effort. We observe instances of interpersonal reconciliation in the Bible, some of which occurred over spans or increments of time. The Old Testament includes the accounts of Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13:5-12); Isaac and Ishmael (Genesis 25:7-11); Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33:1-15); Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 45:1-15).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul's letter to Philemon urges the addressee to reconcile with the runaway slave Onesimus and accept him as a fellow believer. Paul experienced his own journey of conflict and reconciliation with fellow workers of the gospel, including Barnabas, Mark, and even Peter. Indeed, Paul's initial conversion as a believer certainly provoked concern among those he had previously persecuted, and one can fathom the hesitation to accept someone who had been recently a serious threat to the early Christian movement. The course of reconciliation with his former victims was undoubtedly a gradual one.

One of the episodes of the original "Star Trek" television series, titled "Errand of Mercy," is considered a classic for many reasons, including its introduction of the Klingon Empire as the primary nemesis of the United Federation of Planets. The Klingons are an aggressively militaristic species which often incites conflict.

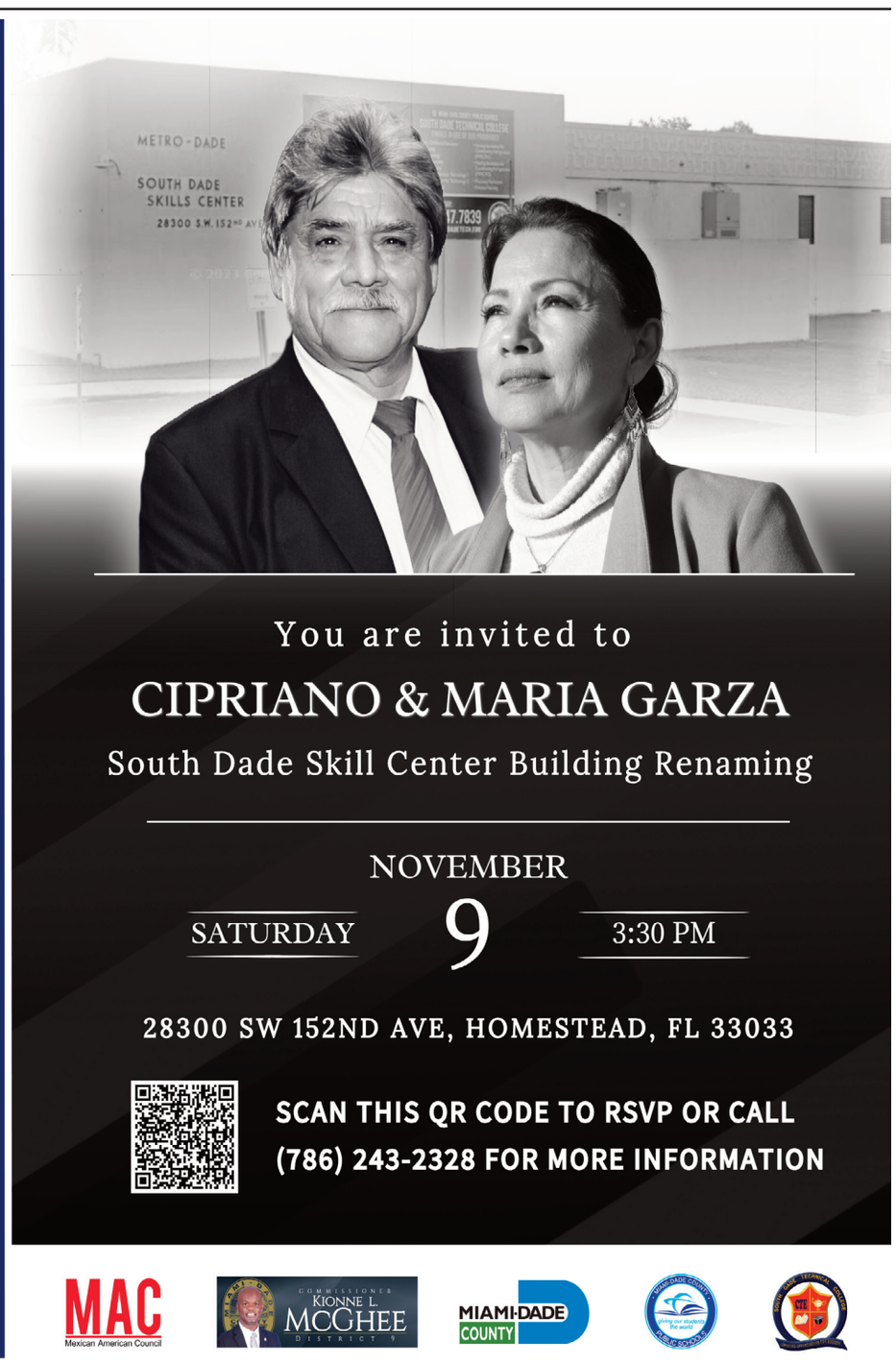
In this episode, the Klingons threaten to invade and subjugate the planet Organia. The crew of the USS Enterprise is ordered to travel there immediately and offer the Organians support and protection via membership in the Federation. The Organian council seem unconcerned regarding the immanent Klingon menace and uninterested in any specific alliance with the Federation, claiming they are not at any risk of harm to themselves or their society. Captain James T. Kirk is baffled by their seemingly nonchalant attitude but persists in his efforts to enlighten them as to the danger they face.

Shortly after the Klingon battalion arrives, Kirk confronts the enemy commander, Kor, who has sternly asserted his assumed governorship of the planet. Kirk and Kor engage in some verbal sparring.

KIRK: You think I'm going to sit here and just talk with the enemy?
KOR: You'll talk. Either here, now, voluntarily, or under our mind-scanner. The fact is, Captain, I have a great admiration for your Starfleet. A remarkable instrument. And I must confess to a certain admiration for you. ... You of the Federation, you are much like us.
KIRK: We're nothing like you. We're a democratic body.
KOR: Come now. I'm not referring to minor ideological differences. I mean that we are similar as a species. ... And there is a universe to be taken.
KIRK: It's a very large universe, Commander, full of people who don't like the Klingons.

When tensions between the contentious parties escalate to the verge of armed combat, the Organians intervene, revealing their true nature: it turns out they are actually highly evolved beings of pure energy who can manifest in any physical form they deem suitable. They are also capable of manipulating matter and energy at will, and so proceed to render the Klingon and Starfleet weaponry unusable, compelling an armistice. A final conversation between Kirk, Kor, and the Organian spokesperson, Ayelborne, provides tremendous — even prophetic — insight.

KOR: You are meddling in things that are none of your business.
KIRK: Even if you have some power that we don't understand, you have no right to dictate to our Federation —
KOR: Or our Empire!
KIRK: — how to handle their interstellar relations! We have the right —
AYELBORNE: To wage war, Captain? To kill millions of innocent people? To destroy life on a planetary scale? Is that what you're defending?
KIRK: Well, no one wants war. But there are proper channels. People have a right to handle their own affairs. Eventually, we will have —
AYELBORNE: Oh, eventually you will have peace, but only after millions of people have died. It is true that in the future, you and the Klingons will become fast friends. You will work together.
KOR: Never!

As it happens, in later iterations of the Star Trek franchise, the Federation and Klingon Empire do indeed become — sometimes reluctantly or begrudgingly — allies.

As believers, our understanding of the scope of God's grand design permits us an effective perspective on the divine intention for redemption. Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential elements of this remedy for restoration. Forgiveness of sin is provided through the singular act of Jesus's sacrifice. By accepting that forgiveness, we can embark on the ensuing and enduring journey towards reconciliation with God and one another, a journey that takes time.